



Martin, TN  
The Navy Cross

## Captain Brent Morel

Faced with continual enemy fire from more than 50 insurgents, Capt. Brent L. Morel - by all accounts a "Marine's Marine" - led an assault across an open field with a handful of Marines following closely behind.

Where most would be looking for cover, Morel's assault was aimed at saving others - not himself - according to battlefield accounts.

Consequently, Morel, a platoon commander with 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division, posthumously received the Navy Cross - the Department of the Navy's second-highest award for combat valor - May 21, 2005, during a ceremony that drew hundreds at the Marine Forces Reserve Training Center.

It was the second Navy Cross awarded in less than two months to a 1st Recon Bn. Marine for combat actions April 7, 2004, during the first offensive in Fallujah as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The two awards are among nine Navy Crosses awarded to U.S. servicemembers for heroism during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Morel's self-sacrifice came as no surprise, Copeland said. "No medal or award can make up for the loss of a good Marine, but as a recon Marine, (Morel) knew that his life was on the line every day - and he was always proud of it," Copeland added.

Although Morel, 27, of Martin, Tenn., had been in the recon community for only a short amount of time, he made his mark among an elite crowd, Copeland said.

The award honored a "man amongst giants," said Mike Morel, Brent's father.

Also during the ceremony -- held at Morel's very first unit after completing boot camp--- a life-like bronze bust of Morel in his helmet and protective vest was unveiled.

"The statue looked so real, right down to the scar he got while he was in boot camp," said Molly Morel, Brent's mother. The statue will be placed in the library at Morel's alma mater, the University of Tennessee at Martin.

"The library is where me and my husband met, so it is only fitting that his statue be kept there to inspire those who pass it by," Amy said.

Morel's award was presented to his wife, Amy. "Although I would rather have him receive the award in person, I am glad to see that his brave actions did not go unnoticed," Amy said, clutching the medal in her hand.

Sgt. Willie L. Copeland III and several other Marines who fought alongside Morel that day were on hand for the presentation.

"That was the type of Marine Morel was - he led from the front," said Copeland, a team leader with 2nd Platoon, Company B, 1st Recon Bn, which Morel commanded. "He was a personal mentor of mine, so I was constantly trying to obtain knowledge from him any way I could."



*Excerpts from article by Lance Cpl. Miguel A. Carrasco Jr.,  
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